



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Country report UK-Scotland

by Jo Hawley

Cite this report as:

European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014).

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report UK-Scotland.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87080_UK_SC.pdf.

In partnership with



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

A project carried out by

ICF
INTERNATIONAL

This country update has been produced by Jo Hawley, as part of the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation, a project managed by ICF International (lead consultants: Jo Hawley, Ilona Murphy and Manuel Souto-Otero). The report has benefitted from feedback from the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) Members for UK-Scotland as well as a quality assurance panel of experts and Cedefop (lead contact Ernesto Villalba-Garcia).

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, Cedefop, ICF International, the EQF AG Members or the members of the quality assurance panel. Neither the European Commission nor any person/organisation acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of any information contained in this publication.

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	National perspective on validation	3
2.1	National legal framework, system or policy on validation	3
2.2	Skills audits	6
2.3	Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation	7
2.4	National institutional framework	8
2.5	Governance and allocation of responsibilities.....	9
2.6	Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives	12
2.7	Inputs, outputs and outcomes	15
3	Information, advice and guidance	16
3.1	Awareness-raising and recruitment	16
3.2	Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions	16
3.3	Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners	17
4	Quality assurance and evaluation.....	17
4.1	Quality Assurance Framework.....	17
4.2	Quality assurance systems/procedures	17
4.3	Evaluation framework.....	18
5	Validation methods	18
5.1	Methods used and the validation process.....	18
6	Validation practitioners.....	20
6.1	Profile of validation practitioners	20
6.2	Provision of training and support to validation practitioners	21
6.3	Qualifications requirements.....	22
7	References	22

1 Introduction

Scotland's approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL) is linked to its national qualifications framework. RPL in this context covers prior formal, non-formal and informal learning in all sectors and can be used for both formative and summative outcomes.

Since 2010, work has been undertaken to take forward RPL with notable developments relating to the supporting tools offered by the SCQF Partnership and also in the HE sector. A review of the use of the RPL toolkit prepared by the SCQF Partnership has led to plans to prepare a new online RPL Guide, while work in the HE sector has led to the production of a document to support institutions to 'streamline' and enhance their RPL processes, and the current development of a national RPL framework for the HE sector.

The 'model' of validation used in Scotland is to provide guidance/frameworks from a centralised perspective (from the SCQFP and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland, (QAA Scotland) as well as the Scottish Qualifications Authority, SQA, which now has its own RPL policy) but for individual learning providers to choose how to implement RPL, from the design and delivery of the approach, to the decision on whether to charge fees to individuals.

Two national RPL networks (one run by the SCQF Partnership and Scottish Higher Education RPL Network, supported by QAA Scotland and Universities Scotland) ensure that there are links between relevant stakeholders. Consultation work has been undertaken since 2010 to explore the use of validation within the third sector.

One of the barriers to take-up is a perception amongst providers that RPL is expensive and time-consuming. It can seem easier and cheaper to include a person in the cohort for a course, rather than to carry out a one-to-one process of RPL. Lack of explicit resourcing for RPL is also an important barrier, particularly in the college sector. For instance if a learner uses RPL to reduce the learning he/she needs to undertake in order to acquire a qualification, this can affect their 'status' and therefore the funding they are entitled to. This might mean that the learner is required to pay for the learning him/herself. For example a learner undertaking fewer modules than a full course is deemed a part-time learner, and since funding is calculated according to hours of attendance, this can affect their funding situation (part-time learners are required to pay their own fees). The college sector is currently reviewing its funding model and therefore this situation may change in the future.

According to a scoping study carried out for the QAA Scotland HE network, in preparation for the drafting of the Streamlining RPL guidelines, areas for future development in this sector include Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for staff; the use of technology to support and streamline RPL support and assessment processes; and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at an institutional level¹.

2 National perspective on validation

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

As outlined in the 2010 country update, in Scotland, an overarching validation methodology known as 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) has been linked to the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). RPL is defined as:

"the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts".

¹ Whittaker R., Julie Brown, Karla H. Benske and Margaret Hawthorne (2011). *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning.*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>

Thus, RPL in the Scottish context goes beyond the validation of non-formal and informal learning, to also include prior formal learning.

The SCQF Guidelines² state that “Clear mechanisms for making RPL claims must be in place. Evidence of learning can be gathered through a variety of different mechanisms.” RPL can be used for the award of credits towards qualifications or in the admissions process (to assess applicants to education and training courses and also to grant exemptions from course units). It is also recognised as a method of supporting personal development planning, career development and to form bridges between non-formal/informal learning and formal education and training.

The SCQF handbook³ describes the two types of recognition which are possible using RPL in Scotland:

Formative recognition: a learning or guidance provider, or the individual themselves, can benchmark their learning against the SCQF level descriptors. This does not result in the award of SCQF credit points.

Summative recognition: a formal assessment of the learner’s prior informal or experiential learning, resulting in the award of SCQF credit points. This may also be referred to as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

Thus the four stages of validation - identification, documentation, assessment and certification - are likely to be used to varying extents, depending on the type of recognition which is taking place.

Guidance on RPL, most notably in the form of the SCQF Handbook⁴ and an ‘RPL toolkit’⁵, can be applied across all education and training sectors, including Higher Education (HE). Aside from the guidance however, there are no formal regulations or requirements for the provision of RPL and thus implementation varies across sectors and providers. To address variation in practice and implementation, the Scottish HE RPL Network have recently worked to produce a National Framework for RPL, which amongst other things encourages all Scottish HEIs to use a common definition for RPL and develop policies and processes to implement RPL. (see below)

The SCQF handbook⁶ describes the ‘key premise of RPL’ which is made up of three key principles:

- *Recognition is given for learning, not for experience alone;*
- *The learning that is recognised should be transferable;*
- *SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL are valued the same as those gained through credit rated learning.*

The handbook also provides guidance for the delivery of RPL, which is described in more detail in the remaining sections of this report.

Since 2010, a number of developments have taken place in relation to RPL. The SCQF has taken forward work relating to its RPL toolkit, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has introduced a new RPL policy and in the HE sector, there have been several developments of note. Each of these are described in turn below.

Firstly, the SCQF RPL toolkit has been reviewed. The toolkit was initially published in March 2010 and then reprinted in December of that year, with over 1,000 copies issued. The aim of the review was to find out what kinds of people/organisations were using the toolkit, and

² The SCQF Guidelines are listed in the SCQF Handbook, 2009.

http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/resources/SCQF_handbook_FULL_-_amended_Dec_09.pdf

³ SCQF Handbook, 2009. http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/resources/SCQF_handbook_FULL_-_amended_Dec_09.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ SCQF RPL Toolkit. <http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/RPL%20Toolkit%20Updated%20v2%20FINAL%20-%20December%202010.pdf>

⁶ SCQF Handbook, 2009. http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/resources/SCQF_handbook_FULL_-_amended_Dec_09.pdf

what they were using it for. This review first involved a testing phase, carried out by Learning Link Scotland, to see if the toolkit was fit for purpose for different types of individuals. The second phase of the review involved a full consultation (an online survey and focus group with stakeholders) which took place in 2012-13⁷. The resulting report found that:

- RPL is most commonly used in the public sector;
- Despite a majority of those consulted indicating they were aware of it, the SCQF's RPL Toolkit is not well used;
- A few organisations consulted had plans to use RPL to enable different learner groups to plan a learning journey or to access formal education and training. Most thought that they could use the RPL Toolkit to help them with this work;
- Feedback collected via the consultation suggested that the Toolkit would benefit from including contextualised information and examples for different sectors and/or learner groups;
- It was also suggested that the Toolkit could be enhanced by including additional practical guidance on how to set up, administrate and evolve RPL within an organisation;
- Some respondents suggested there is a need for more training in RPL and how to use the RPL Toolkit.

As a result of the review, there are plans to develop online RPL Guides, both for learners and providers. These Guides will provide for example the following types of information: 'jargon-busting'; benefits of RPL; signposting on how to carry out an RPL process; and example RPL scenarios. The Guides will be available from the SCQF Partnership website and it is anticipated that they will be finalised in summer 2014.

The SQA⁸ has also now developed its own RPL policy. SQA's policy is to recognise prior learning as a method of assessing whether a learner's experience and achievements meet the evidence requirements (i.e. the standard) of a SQA Unit or Units and which may or may not have been developed through a course of learning. RPL can be used for the assessment of Units in the following types of qualification:

- Higher National Certificate and Diplomas (except Graded Units),
- Professional Development Awards,
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications,
- National Progression Awards,
- National Certificates,
- Awards.

There are also a range of Units and assessments which cannot be achieved through RPL, including for example where there are regulatory, professional or other statutory requirements⁹.

In HE, as outlined in the UK report covering England and Northern Ireland, the Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA) has introduced a new [Quality Code for HE](#), which is 'the definitive reference point for all UK HE providers'. This new Quality Code replaces the set of national reference points known as the Academic Infrastructure. The Quality Code sets out the 'expectations' that all providers of UK HE are required to meet (the Code applies to England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland,). Each expectation is accompanied by a series of indicators that reflect 'sound practice', and through which providers can demonstrate they are meeting the relevant expectation.

⁷ Kerson Associates (2013). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the SCQF RPL Toolkit, Review Report*. (unpublished)

⁸ <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/41328.html>

⁹ RPL cannot be used as a method of assessment for: HN Graded Units; course and/or external assessments; other integrative assessment Units (which may or not be graded); certain types of assessment instruments where the standard may be compromised by not using the same assessment method outlined in the Unit; where there is an existing requirement for a licence to practice; where there are specific health and safety requirements; where there are regulatory, professional or other statutory requirements; where otherwise specified an assessment strategy, for example, in Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

RPL is given significantly more emphasis in the new Quality Code and is specifically included in a chapter entitled 'Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning' as well as in the chapter on Admissions. By bringing together assessment in relation to formal learning and RPL in one chapter, the aim was to demonstrate that both forms of assessment share common principles and that the quality assurance of RPL should be as firmly embedded as quality assurance for any other aspect of HE provision.

Additional activity is taking place in the Scottish HE sector with regard to RPL. For example, QAA Scotland is working with the Scottish HE sector, through the QAA Scotland & Universities Scotland RPL HEI Network, to develop a National Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), as outlined in the box below.

RPL National Framework for Higher Education¹⁰

QAA Scotland is currently developing a national framework for RPL, which was launched in April 2014, to support RPL developments at all levels across the sector, as outlined below:

At **Sector** level, the framework aims to allow HEIs and other organisations to share, develop and enhance practice in RPL in a consistent and sustainable manner, through:

- Sector principles to ensure a minimum benchmark for RPL policy and practice for HEIs,
- Raising awareness amongst senior policy managers in HEIs and other organisations of the value of RPL to widen participation and encourage the development of flexible, learner-centred curricula,
- Develop the Scottish HE RPL Network as a Community of Practice,
- Develop the Scottish HE RPL Network as a source of expertise in RPL policy and practice development.

At **institutional** level, the framework aims to reduce inconsistencies in RPL processes between and within HEIs, by:

- Implementing the [Streamlining RPL Guidelines](#)¹¹ at institutional level,
- Updating/refreshing examples of practice in the Guidelines.
- Developing understanding of RPL

The framework aims to support **students** by raising awareness and increasing transparency of RPL and clearly identifying its benefits to them, in the following ways;

- Working with HEIs to encourage them to produce clear guidance and information for students,
- Developing resources and identifying good practice to help HEIs to achieve the above,
- Encouraging HEIs to raise awareness of the benefits of RPL for students.

Finally for **professional statutory and regulatory bodies** the framework aims to raise awareness of and increase transparency of RPL, and clearly identify the benefits of RPL to them, by:

- Developing clear and transparent guidance on RPL for professional, statutory and regulatory bodies,
- Working with professional statutory and regulatory bodies which have well established RPL practices to identify and share practice,
- Developing case studies of RPL in a professional statutory and regulatory body context.

The National Framework can be found on the QAA Scotland Enhancement website:

<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/recognition-of-prior-learning---national-framework-for-scottish-higher-education.pdf>

2.2 Skills audits

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have formulated a joint strategy - 'Integrated Employment and Skills (IES)' – which is designed to ensure that unemployed customers are supported through a Careers Information and

¹⁰ Information taken from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/DevelopmentAndEnhancement/Pages/national-framework-rpl-higher-education.aspx>

¹¹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

Guidance (CIAG) service to develop Career Management Skills (CMS) to help them achieve sustainable employment training or learning. SDS focuses on enabling individuals to develop their own CMS, which will enable them to plan and pursue life, learning and work opportunities. A Career Management Skills Framework¹² has been developed by SDS, Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SQA and other professional guidance practitioners and academics. The Framework is used to inform the development and delivery of career information, advice and guidance services delivered by SDS.

In addition, SDS has developed a career management skills assessment process which is focused particularly on young people aged between 15-19, but can also be used with other age groups. However it is not a mandatory requirement within IES.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) also offers skills diagnostic tools that individuals can access online¹³. These tools are designed to provide information for individuals seeking to identify their skills, interests and motivations to support their career development.

The SCQF Partnership has also prepared three guides which employers can use to help in the identification of skills and training needs:

- *How To: Use The SCQF in Recruitment and Staff Selection* – shows how the SCQF can be used to help employers to understand and describe the skills they need, enabling them to write effective person specifications;
- *How To: Use the SCQF for Workforce Development* - shows how to undertake a skills audit and identify any skills gaps using the SCQF;
- *The Employer Levelling Tool and Support Materials* – supports employers to allocate an SCQF level to a job role and give an indication of the level of knowledge and skills which a job holder at that level may require.

In addition, the SCQF Partnership, Glasgow Caledonian University and SDS have worked together to create the 'My Skills, My Future' resources which can be used by advisers in a range of settings to help the users to identify the transferable skills they have developed in other settings (e.g. hobbies, part-time jobs etc), to think about those skills through reflective practices, and map those skills using the SCQF as an informal benchmark. These tools are aimed at the people who are most in need of this kind of support, including for example people who have been made redundant. See Section 2.6 for a more detailed description of the 'My Skills My Future' resources.

2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

The methodology for RPL is based on the 12-level [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (SCQF). This Framework aims to be all-inclusive and to take account of all types of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning across all sectors (public, private and the voluntary sector). However, the framework is not intended to be used solely as a way of categorising and understanding qualifications or to formally credit prior learning. It is also intended to be used to support learners to identify their level of competences and skills against the framework and plan their learning and career development accordingly. The framework is therefore intended to support formative recognition, as well as summative recognition.

SCQF Levels are based on a single set of Level Descriptors, which are “*the common reference points and definitions that provide a way of recognising learning that is outcome-based and quality-assured*”¹⁴. In 2012, the level descriptors of the SCQF were revised, in response to findings that practitioners supporting learners found the descriptors hard to work

¹² http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/752669/career_management_skills_framework_scotland.pdf

¹³ Please see: <http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk>

¹⁴ SCQF Handbook. http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/resources/SCQF_handbook_FULL_-_amended_Dec_09.pdf

with. The changes were mainly to the language used within the descriptors and to make them more relevant for work-based learning

Credit systems

The SCQF is based on Credit Points, with one SCQF Credit Point equating to a notional 10 hours of learning (based on the time judged to be required for an 'average' learner to achieve the learning outcomes). Summative recognition of prior learning can be used to award SCQF Credit Points; following a formal assessment SCQF Credit Points can be awarded to recognise prior learning that has not already been assessed or credit rated. SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL are of the same value as credit gained through other formal learning. Limits on the number of credits which can be awarded through RPL are not set at national level – however the SCQF Guidelines¹⁵ do state that credit limits for RPL within formal qualifications and learning programmes must be made explicit and that programme limits, if any, on the credit that can be awarded for RPL within a qualification or learning programme should be clearly stated, as should any implications for progression, grading or classification.

The SQA also states that RPL can be used to assess complete or partial SQA Units. Where evidence can only be provided to partially meet the requirements of a unit, other methods of assessment must be used to complete the outstanding requirements, because the minimum level of awarding and certification is a complete SQA Unit. In some instances, it is possible to achieve a full 'Group Award' through RPL but SQA notes that it is unlikely that a learner would have sufficient prior learning and experience to do this¹⁶.

In HE, RPL can be used to gain credit or exemption for qualifications, as well as to gain admission to a study programme. The new Quality Code for HE states that any limit on the award of credit (where used) or exemption through RPL must be clearly stated in the HEI's regulations, as well as the way in which this credit can be used for the purposes of progression, the making of an intermediate or final award, and any grading or classification of that award.

Standards

The SCQF Handbook states that formative recognition of prior learning involves a comparison of the outcomes of an individual's learning with the aforementioned SCQF Level Descriptors (these "*define the generic outcomes for the characteristics for each of the SCQF Levels*"). Summative recognition requires a comparison of the individual's prior learning with the aims and/or outcomes of the qualification or learning programme concerned. This comparison should determine the SCQF Level and the number of SCQF Credit Points that can be awarded to recognise the prior learning, either through specific credit within a qualification or learning programme, or entry to a qualification or learning programme as an alternative to normal entry requirements¹⁷.

As mentioned above, RPL in relation to SQA qualifications is measured against the evidence requirements (i.e. standards) of the relevant SQA Unit or Units.

2.4 National institutional framework

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership** was established in 2006. This partnership consists of:

- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA);
- Colleges Scotland;
- The SQA; and

¹⁵ These Guidelines can be found in the SCQF Handbook

¹⁶ SQA RPL Policy: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67029.html>

¹⁷ SCQF Handbook. http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/resources/SCQF_handbook_FULL_-_amended_Dec_09.pdf

■ Universities Scotland.

The partnership is a registered charity and also a company limited by guarantee, which means that the development of the SCQF is centred around the learner and is not influenced by changes in policy.

As was the case in 2010, the SCQF Partnership has responsibility for maintaining the quality assurance and integrity of the SCQF, as well as its further promotion and development, whilst maintaining relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and Internationally. The SCQF Partnership also offers advice and support for all types of stakeholders involved in RPL.

There is a national-level **RPL network**, which has been established by the SCQF Partnership. The network is made up of representatives from across different education and training sectors, including employers, professional bodies and the Scottish Government. Its aim is to share practice and help increase understanding, awareness and use of RPL across all stakeholders to encourage take up by learners. The network's programme of work is based on activities to support the use of RPL within formal education and training, in the workplace, in the community and in relation to careers guidance.

As indicated above, the SQA also has its own RPL policy, relating to SQA awards.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)¹⁸ provides career information, advice and guidance services and works closely with the SCQF Partnership in the implementation of RPL and the SCQF in Scotland. The 'My Strengths' diagnostics tools described above in Section 2.2 are one of the SDS services offered through its 'My World of Work' online portal¹⁹.

In the HE sector, there is also a **QAA Scotland/Universities Scotland HEI RPL network**, which is coordinated by QAA Scotland. The HEI RPL network is also involved in the European RPL Network.

2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

2.5.1 Please describe the allocation of responsibilities (at national, regional, local, social partner, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

Whilst national-level frameworks are in place for RPL, responsibility for the actual design and implementation of RPL procedures lies with individual education providers. The allocation of responsibilities for the different aspects of validation is described in more detail below.

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers:

As noted above, responsibility for the delivery of RPL is held at the level of the provider and thus there is considerable diversity in the way RPL is implemented. The design of individual RPL procedures, provision of counselling and guidance, assessment, internal quality assurance and evaluation are all undertaken by the individual provider.

Only universities, colleges and other SCQF Credit Rating Bodies (CRBs) can formally award SCQF Levels and Credit Points through RPL. These are the organisations responsible for allocating a level of learning and number of credit points to a qualification or learning. Since the establishment of the SCQF in 2001, there has been a significant increase in the number of CRBs, which now include all publicly-funded tertiary colleges and a number of other approved organisations, as well as the SQA and higher education institutions (HEIs), which were the original CRBs.

Individual HEIs prepare their own RPL guidelines but these should be consistent with the SCQF guidelines, which all universities subscribe to. In developing and implementing RPL,

¹⁸ <http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

¹⁹ <http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/>

HEIs must also align their policies and procedures to the UK Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (QAA)

The RPL national Framework for Scottish Higher Education (QAA, 2014), which includes agreed sector level principles, is aligned to the UK Quality Code. It is thought that RPL is standard practice in most HEIs in Scotland. In some institutions this is focussed on certain fields of study, in others it is focussed at certain levels.

External quality assurance of the credit rating bodies is the responsibility of Education Scotland (for colleges), the Scottish Government and external auditors (for SQA). In HE, the responsibility for external QA lies with QAA Scotland and for other Credit Rating Bodies with SCQFP.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

RPL is less used in the private sector, in comparison to the public sector. However there are a small number of organisations within this sector which have RPL processes and procedures in place.

Some examples have been identified for this report of RPL policies and practices relating to learning in the workplace (within both the public and private sectors):

- As described in the 2010 update, the Scottish Police College has an RPL policy in place. Working together with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), the Scottish Police College allows entry/access, exemptions/credits, direct entry to year 2 or 3, and full award of the BA in police studies and other CPD qualifications;
- Several RPL initiatives can be found within the National Health Service (NHS)²⁰;
- RPL is offered through the Poultry Passport scheme and other Skills Passports used in different sectors (see the UK – England and Northern Ireland report for more detail);
- In the health and social care sector, an RPL profiling tool was developed as the result of a pilot project which took place between 2006 and 2008 (see the case study produced for the 2010 Inventory update which describes this project in more detail). This profiling tool has been adapted by Kinross and Perth council (KPC) for its work with the long-term unemployed. The new tool allows the users to prepare evidence for a portfolio, based on reflection on their experiences and skills. An assessor supports the user through a professional discussion, enabling the learner to match his/her learning to SVQ units and identify supporting evidence²¹.

Third sector organisations

Again, RPL is less used in the third sector, in comparison to the public sector. However there are a small number of organisations within this sector which have RPL processes and procedures in place. Two examples of specific projects taking place in the third sector have been identified for this 2014 country report, which are described in the two boxes below.

A small piece of work was undertaken by Learning Link Scotland in 2011 to look at the potential use of the SCQF RPL toolkit in the voluntary adult learning sector²². This small project found that providers in the voluntary adult learning sector use RPL as part of the engagement process, to give adults access/entry to a learning programme i.e. recognising the validity of their existing experiences to encourage and give confidence. They also use RPL as part of the learning experience with learners; using it as a model to teach reflective practice. However, as the learning offered by these providers is often strongly rooted in action learning or group work; they preferred not to use RPL as a means of 'bypassing' parts of the course. Finally, the providers were willing to use RPL to link their learning programmes to SCQF level descriptors.

²⁰ [http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/educational-development/initiatives/recognition-of-prior-learning-\(rpl\).aspx](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/educational-development/initiatives/recognition-of-prior-learning-(rpl).aspx)

²¹ Recognition of Prior Learning and how sectors are using it in the UK and Europe (unpublished)

²² Learning Link Scotland, 2011, Building Use of the SCQF RPL Toolkit, Report to Education Scotland. Internet: <http://www.learninglinkscotland.org.uk/media/112817/building%20use%20of%20the%20scqf%20rpl%20toolkit.pdf>

A second project was carried out by Learning Link Scotland in 2012 to test the RPL toolkit for voluntary sector adult learning organisations. This project is described in the box below.

RPL toolkit for voluntary sector adult learning organisations

This project, funded by the SCQF Partnership, was carried out by Learning Link Scotland²³ in early 2012 to test the SCQF RPL toolkit within voluntary sector adult learning organisations. Two voluntary sector adult learning organisations tested the toolkit with a learner: Skillnet, an organisation working with minority ethnic communities, through education, training and pathways to sustainable employment; and Sikh Sanjog, which aims to provide a range of quality opportunities for Sikh and other Minority Ethnic women and their families. Three coaching sessions were held with each of these organisations, with the aim of increasing their understanding of the role of RPL in working with learners. The project findings included:

- *A greater understanding of how the toolkit might be used in the voluntary sector* - for example with people from BME communities and who have come from overseas, with young adults, ex-offenders and homeless people, and with practitioners from the voluntary sector as a CPD tool;
- *Ideas for how the toolkit could be improved* – such as training for facilitators in how to use the toolkit, the need for a worked example of how to use the toolkit to map people's experience against the SCQF, and the need to recognise the possibilities of RPL to support progression into employment as well as education;
- *An improved understanding of how RPL can be used to support learners* – e.g. that RPL can help learners to better understand and give credit to their life and work experience, and that it can be useful at the entry point to a course or learning programme.

Three recommendations were made resulting from the work:

- to produce or identify resources to develop workshops and training for practitioners wishing to use the toolkit;
- to look further into the possible use of the toolkit within practitioner CPD
- to adapt and enhance the toolkit to raise understanding of the SCQF and the links between RPL and the SCQF level descriptors²⁴.

A second interesting project from the third sector relates to the recognition of non-formal learning young people acquire through their participation in scouting. It is described in the box below.

Scouts of Scotland – Non-formal Learning for young people

The aim of the Scottish scouting organisation is to support young people in their development, as outlined in their purpose:

“The purpose of Scouting is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potential as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities.”

The Scouting programme and award scheme is for young people from age 6 to 25. Work has been undertaken by Scouts of Scotland to map young people's learning from their scouting activities against the curriculum of the formal education system (the Curriculum for Excellence). The learning outcomes of the programme and scheme have been linked to the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens.

Scouts for Scotland is now actively supporting its volunteers so that they can develop local partnerships with schools. For example, Armadale Academy in West Lothian has worked with Explorer Scouts and other young people who are undertaking volunteer leadership in their community, by offering them the chance to gain the new SQA Leadership Award. By supporting the Young Leaders and recognising the volunteering they were already doing, the school helped a number of its pupils to gain an additional qualification. Another example is Cairneyhill scouts, which offered scouts participating in a summer expedition to Japan the chance to recognise the learning

²³ The national voluntary sector organisation that works to support the development of community based adult learning.

²⁴ Learning Link Scotland, 2012, Testing out the Use of the SCQF/RPL Toolkit.

they achieved during the trip in the form of a Personal Development SQA.

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

As mentioned above, there are two RPL networks operating in Scotland: the SCQF RPL network and the QAA /Universities Scotland HEI RPL network. Thus there are opportunities for learning to be shared amongst stakeholders across the sectors of learning, work and the third sector. Furthermore, the ongoing activity to maintain interest in RPL and strengthen the support materials available to providers should help to ensure that Scotland's devolved approach to RPL (where responsibility for implementation lies with the learning providers) continues to develop. In the Higher Education sector, the National RPL Framework is likely to strengthen future developments even further.

Nevertheless, according to one interviewee, without a national strategy for RPL, there remains a challenge to encourage wider take-up. Guidance and advice is provided at national level but there is no obligation on providers to offer RPL opportunities. The online RPL Guide for providers is intended to help them to understand how they might engage with RPL processes and so may help to improve take-up. To further improve the current arrangements, a policy would be needed, setting out the responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved. The same interviewee suggested that a peer learning opportunity, bringing together sector representatives, might help to encourage greater take-up/provision.

2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

The recent Review of RPL and the SCQF RPL Toolkit²⁵ found that in Scotland, RPL is most commonly applied in the public sector, notably in HE. Examples of RPL in use identified through the Review²⁶ include:

- National Health Service (NHS) projects with healthcare support workers, estates staff and dental nurses, looking at the use of RPL to support the acquisition of credit/exemptions/ qualifications;
- Universities using RPL to support both admissions and the award of credit at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as using RPL within the context of work-based learning programmes; and
- Local councils offering RPL within schools and lifelong learning settings, e.g. to ensure learners are offered appropriate learning opportunities.

Two interesting examples from the HE sector have been identified for this update. These are described in turn, in the two boxes below.

Making Experience Count, University of the West of Scotland

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) follows a centralised approach to the application of RPL- the university's Lifelong Learning Academy is the focus for advice and guidance to students and staff on RPL. The Academy offers a module (credit rated 10 points at SCQF level 7) called 'Making Experience Count', which provides information, advice and guidance to students wishing to make a RPL claim. The module helps students to make connections between learning they have already acquired through both formal and non-formal situations and the contribution this may make to future learning. By developing a clearer understanding of knowledge and skills already gained participants are able to use this to influence decisions about the direction they wish to take in terms of further learning, employment or community activity.

The module aims to:

- Promote recognition of strengths and skills gained through RPL to increase self-confidence and motivation,

²⁵ Kerson Associates (2013). *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the SCQF RPL Toolkit, Review Report* (unpublished)

²⁶ Ibid.

- Develop personal learning outcomes linked to prior learning and the SCQF level descriptors,
- Provide evidence of learning and skills aligned to learning outcomes with particular reference to further study or personal and professional development.

The module has been further developed to support RPL bridging mechanisms within a number of degree programmes which allow entry with advanced standing for experienced professional staff through RPL. Notable examples are towards the BSc Childhood Practice, BSc Health Studies and BSc Occupational Safety and Health. Potential applicants for RPL undertake this module to gain an understanding of the process required to submit a claim for accreditation. Through workshops students are tutored on the process and are provided with an information pack with all the required information, including guidelines to prepare them for the task of making a claim for RPL.

When undertaking a subsequent claim for RPL students are provided with an Academic Supervisor with relevant expertise. Extensive feedback is provided at each stage and on completion the student submits a portfolio of evidence for assessment. This is double marked and is subject to external examination. All successful claims for RPL are considered at subject panels and follow UWS's quality assurance framework and regulations for an award.

The Making Experience Count module is offered at a nominal fee of GBP 30 (EUR 35). At present there is no additional fee for the process of supervising and assessing RPL for credit towards an award.

In the academic year 2012-13, over 50 students successfully completed the Making Experience Count module and subsequently make a successful claim for RPL. They were able to access degree programmes with advanced standing incorporating credit gained through RPL..

Recognition of Experiential and Accredited Learning Project (REAL)

The REAL project is an RPL project targeted at adult educators. It offers a chance for them to have the skills, knowledge and competence they have gained through practice experience and in-service training recognised and validated. The main outcome of the project will be the development of a toolkit, which will enable adult educators to benchmark their own experience against their national qualifications framework. In addition to this, the REAL project is intended to provide learners with an opportunity to take control of the process of recognising, valuing and accrediting their previous learning and to ensure that they can learn from this process as well.

The project is led by the University of Stirling, with the following project partners: Learning Link Scotland, SCQF Partnership, Tallinn University, the Romanian Institute for Adult Education (IREA) and Limerick University. The project intends to build on previous RPL work, including EU-funded projects and the RPL toolkit developed by the SCQF Partnership. By using the EQF as a comparator, the intention is to develop a toolkit which is transferable to other national qualification systems.

The project commenced in early 2013. The first activity undertaken was a scoping exercise, which enabled partners to identify best practices in various aspects of RPL. Next a pilot toolkit was developed and tested with a number of adult educators from different parts of the Scottish adult education community. The results of the initial testing phase will be taken into account in the further development of the toolkit. It will then be tested by adult educators in Estonia, Ireland and Romania. Finally the project outputs will be disseminated via a seminar, conference and website. Options to secure the sustainability of the toolkit are currently being considered by the project partners.

In terms of specific target groups, an interesting example is the 'My Skills, My Future' resources which are targeted mainly at young people at risk of leaving school early, or who have already left school with few or no formal qualifications. It is described in the box below.

My Skills, My Future

The 'My Skills, My Future' resources are primarily targeted at young people who are considered to be at risk of leaving school, or who have already left school, with few or no formal qualifications. They can also be used with young people who have been made redundant from their first job, adult returners to the workplace or the long-term unemployed.

The resources can be used by advisers in a range of settings to help the users to identify the transferable skills they have developed in other settings (e.g. hobbies, part-time jobs etc), to think

about those skills through reflective practices, and map those skills using the SCQF as an informal benchmark. The tools use a contextualised version of the SCQF level descriptors, to make it easier for young people to understand them. The resources also help the young people to write competence-based statements for a CV or application for further learning.

The My Skills, My Future resources have already been used with a range of individuals, including young people leaving care settings. This initial use of the resources has highlighted some potential benefits, which are:

- The resources help individuals clearly understand their range of skills
- They can help the users in a decision-making process regarding future career or further training
- By helping individuals to understand where their learning sits on the SCQF, their self-confidence and aspirations can be raised which helps build self-confidence and raises aspirations
- Using the resources can be a way of generating evidence towards certain SQA awards

The My Skills My Future resources were developed by the SCQF Partnership, Glasgow Caledonian University's Centre for Learning Enhancement and Academic Development (GCU LEAD) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), working in partnership. The resources were launched in May 2013 and have been disseminated via training workshops for advisers (which have been fully subscribed).

Another project targeted at a specific group is the Leonardo da Vinci-funded project 'Age Management in Practice (AMaP)', which is described in the box below.

Age Management in Practice (AMaP)

The Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Strathclyde is the coordinating partner of the AMaP project, which aims to support older workers (aged 50+) to access and participate in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET), and to increase awareness of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The project also takes account of the employer perspective on the challenge of the ageing workforce, by seeking current views and attitudes towards older workers and promoting the implementation of age management practices. Other partner organisations are from Germany, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Sweden.

The AMaP learning model aims to engage and inspire older workers to re-engage in learning and development and to help them to find out more about the value of VET/CVET and lifelong learning. It was inspired mainly by two other models: the Realising Your Potential (RYP) model, from the University of Strathclyde, addressed to older workers; and the Recognition and Validation of Competences methodologies used in Portugal for the adult population in general. The learning model activities are based around questions such as:

- What have I achieved in my life?
- Where do I want to go now?

The piloting of the learning model took place in Portugal, Germany and Poland and a total of 67 older workers successfully completed the learning programme in the three countries.

More information about the project can be found at: <http://www.a-map.eu/>

Europass/Youthpass

In 2013, the UK was the ninth country in the list of the top 20 countries which visited the Europass portal (specific data for Scotland is not available). In terms of downloads of Europass CV/ Language Passport documents, English was the sixth highest language

(however it is worth bearing in mind these figures will include users from other countries, including of course Ireland)²⁷.

The number of organisations that have issued Youthpass certificates in the UK (specific data for Scotland is not available) has ranged from 104 in 2010 to 147 in 2012 (dropping slightly to 131 in 2013). Youthpass certificates had been issued for 246 projects in 2013, again a slight drop from 257 in 2012 but an overall increase since 2010 (from 201). There was a significant increase in the total number of Youthpass certificates issued in the UK between 2010 and 2013, from 1740 to 3406 in 2013²⁸.

Interviewees suggested that awareness of Europass/Youthpass is relatively limited in Scotland.

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

There is no national funding framework for the actual implementation of RPL (nationally-funded projects include for example the work on the new RPL Guides). Implementation is funded at the level of the sector, provider or by the individuals themselves. In Higher Education, there is generally no charge for RPL which takes place as part of the admissions process but RPL claims for credit tend to be subject to a fee, which varies across institutions²⁹. The SQA charges standard fees regardless of the assessment approach (RPL is seen as a method of assessing).

2.7.2 Distribution of costs

Organisations can charge costs for the provision of RPL. These are decided at the level of the organisation and there are no national-level rules or guidance on how much providers should charge. With regard to HE, the QAA Quality Code states only that there should be clear information on how much institutions charge for an RPL procedure.

2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries

No data is available at national level on the number of people who have undergone RPL in Scotland. A recent study found that RPL is most commonly used in the public sector, notably the HE sector, where HEIs are most likely to have a RPL policy, processes and procedures in place.

In HE, it has been noted that RPL monitoring and data collection needs to be improved. Many HEIs are already trying to address this issue and to use integrated student management information systems to improve data capture and analysis³⁰.

2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

As noted above, as is the case in many other European countries, data on participation in RPL is scarce. A small study of learners' experiences of RPL within the HE sector³¹ found that all of the learners consulted felt that the RPL process helped them to develop their knowledge and skills, by enabling them to:

- *“revisit and consolidate existing knowledge and experience;*
- *develop their academic writing;*

²⁷ Europass website 2013 activity report.

http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/Statistics/3_Annual_activity/2013/Europass_Statistic_Reports_Year_Visits_Downloads_2013.PDF

²⁸ Data supplied by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, extracted 10 September 2013

²⁹ OECD. *Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Country Background Report: UK.* http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_37141759_1_1_1_1,00.html

³⁰ Whittaker, R. and Julie Brown, 2012, *Streamlining and Enhancing Recognition of Prior Learning Support and Assessment.* Internet: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

³¹ Based on a sample of nine students, from three universities

- *recognise, acknowledge and gain credit from experience; and*
- *develop an academic mind-set which was advantageous to their future academic study.”*

On a more personal level, the learners felt the RPL process:

- *“provided a general sense of achievement,*
- *raised confidence,*
- *developed reflection and thinking styles, and*
- *enabled manageable engagement with formal learning by shortening the time to gain their degree.”*

Finally, *“the realisation by them that the learning they had from life experience was useful and valuable appeared to provide them with a certain sense of fulfilment”.*

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

At national level, information on RPL is provided on the SCQF website. This information is presented with different target audiences in mind: Employers, Learners, Education providers and Advisers. RPL case studies are also available from the website, which demonstrate how the use of RPL has benefited learners, employees and employers.

The QAA Quality Code includes an indicator which states that HEIs must make sure that *“Those who might be eligible for the recognition of prior learning are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment for recognition.”* The Code goes on to state that the form of support offered to individuals who wish to undergo an RPL process will vary according to the *“higher education provider’s approach to RPL and the nature and number of claims it receives”.*

Examples of universities’ approaches to engaging and informing potential RPL candidates include:

- An Education Guidance Adviser from the Lifelong Learning Academy at **UWS** meets with potential RPL candidates and gives them information on the university’s RPL procedures, as well as initial guidance on reflection and how to formulate learning outcomes relating to their prior learning.
- UHI have flexible entry RPL guidelines and a handbook for students on how to access/follow these guidelines.
- Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has School, Advisors’ and Assessors’ Guides to support the implementation of the GCU RPL Policy as well as a Guide for Students and an on-line Expression of Interest form.

In the aforementioned small study of learners’ experiences of RPL within the HE sector some students suggested that there needed to be more ‘clarity’ and explanation before the learner starts the RPL process, or during the initial induction period: *“This lack of clarity affected some understanding of the requirements and impacted negatively on some students who felt that they had to do more work than was absolutely necessary to get the credit, or felt a little aggrieved because what they thought was the case turned out not to be”*³².

3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

It is the role of Skills Development Scotland to provide information to individuals about employment and learning opportunities. Its ‘My World of Work’³³ website signposts individuals to the SCQF website to find out more information about RPL.

³² Harris, M; J Brown and L Proudfoot (2012). *Learners’ Experiences of the Process of Recognition of Prior Informal Learning*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/learners-experiences-rpl.aspx>

³³ <http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk>

Individual guidance providers would refer individuals to a learning provider, if they identified RPL as an appropriate pathway for the individual. Within learning providers, guidance may be provided by APL coordinators, where these exist, or guidance or teaching staff.

3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

The SCQF Guidelines state that “*effective links between learning providers, guidance services and Human Resource personnel, where appropriate, should be established to support individuals for RPL*”. The SCQF Partnership offers workshops for staff working with learners wishing to make RPL claims, which aim to “*explore current thinking on RPL and credit transfer and help to clarify practice around these topics*”.

With regard to advisers working with young people, as mentioned above the ‘My Skills My Future’ resources were developed to help them to support young people to access RPL. In addition, as mentioned above, in response to findings that practitioners supporting learners found the SCQF level descriptors hard to work with, the descriptors were revised in 2012.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

As outlined in the 2010 update, according to the SCQF handbook, the award of credit for prior learning can only be carried out by SCQF Credit Rating Bodies, within the context of clearly defined quality assurance mechanisms. Organisations wishing to become credit rating bodies are subject to a rigorous application process. The SCQF handbook states that RPL assessment procedures, including the appeals process, should be consistent with the normal assessment and general quality assurance of the organisation.

The SQA holds a regulatory, i.e. quality assurance role, for its qualifications. Through its external verification procedures, learning providers’ procedures for RPL will be quality assured, as part of the overall quality assurance (i.e. audit) process.

With regard to the HE sector, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at an institutional level are identified as one of the key institutional enablers required to streamline and enhance RPL support and assessment processes. A lack of formal evaluation of RPL has been identified and improved monitoring is also needed in order to support a process of reviewing and enhancing practice³⁴.

4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

As explained in the 2010 update, individual learning providers have their own quality assurance systems/procedures in place. Systems verifiers and external verifiers from awarding bodies, including the SQA, ensure that assessors across the country are assessing to the same standards – including assessments of non-formal and informal learning.

The SQA RPL policy states that RPL should be subject to the same internal verification by Centres as other methods of assessment. At the same time, SQA will also adopt the same approach to quality assurance as it would for any other method of assessment. Appeals from learners are required to follow the same process applicable to standard assessment of the Unit(s) or Group Award and/or Centre type concerned³⁵.

³⁴ Whittaker R., Julie Brown, Karla H. Benske and Margaret Hawthorne (2011). *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>

³⁵ SQA RPL policy. <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67029.html>

In HE, the quality assurance of RPL assessment processes tend to be the same as the normal quality assurance processes for programme assessment³⁶. As mentioned above, the QAA oversees how well individual universities and colleges meet their responsibilities. The introduction of the new 'expectations' in the QAA Quality Code marks a significant change, as previously the Academic Infrastructure did not set out any mandatory requirements. RPL has now been included in the expectation relating to assessment:

Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

This means that (from August 2014, when the Quality Code will become a reference point for the purposes of reviews carried out by QAA) RPL will be taken into account in the reviews of HE institutions which are carried out by the QAA on a four to six yearly basis. This could potentially raise the profile of RPL. Nevertheless, the actual implementation of RPL remains very much within the hands of the individual HEI.

4.3 Evaluation framework

A national level evaluation framework was not identified through the research. Individual projects may be subject to internal or external evaluation

5 Validation methods

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

In relation to SQA qualifications, although the use of RPL is relatively limited, learner portfolios are the most commonly used method³⁷.

Information on the methods used for validation in Scotland could only be identified in relation to the HE sector, where the predominant form of assessment for RPL is via a portfolio³⁸. Some examples of university assessment methods are:

- At UWS individuals wishing to make an RPL claim must develop learning outcomes which are aligned to the learning outcomes of the programme concerned and SCQF level descriptors. They are not required to match their learning against module outcomes as this is considered too rigid/constrictive when recognising learning of an experiential or work-based nature. The RPL claim itself must include a piece of written work of 3,000-5,000 words (regardless of the size of the claim), which links theory to practice. This written work should also be accompanied by a portfolio of evidence. Claims for RPL are double marked and open to external examination. Results are approved through subject panels where students are required to give a short presentation and take part in a question and answer session on the work produced. The RPL process results in a pass/fail grade only. The Making Your Experience Count module, described above, is offered to support RPL applicants in the reflective and evidence-gathering process³⁹.
- At Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) a wide range of evidence-gathering mechanisms can be used for RPL. For example, within the School of Health and Life Sciences, an RPL Mapping Tool aligned to SCQF level descriptors can be used. This tool enables applicants who do not have an honours degree and wish to apply directly for admission to a postgraduate programme to demonstrate their learning through

³⁶ Whittaker, R. and Julie Brown, 2012, *Streamlining and Enhancing Recognition of Prior Learning Support and Assessment*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

³⁷ Information provided by representative of SQA

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Streamlining RPL guidelines and UWS case study* http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/UniversityWestScotland_RPL.pdf

experience within the context of their professional roles, responsibilities and activities within their field of practice.

- Various assessment methods are used at the University of Abertay, including direct observation of practice, simulation or role play, presentation of artefacts, assessment on demand, written assignments, oral examinations and portfolios⁴⁰.

A small study of learners' experiences of RPL within the HE sector⁴¹ found a wide range of assessment methods being used, from CVs and essays to portfolios, vivas and presentations. Some academic writing and the application of theory and practice were involved in all claims. Evidence used to support the claims included statements of learning from current job roles and the workplace.

The same study found that the format of the claim (i.e. the documentation the learners presented as evidence of their learning) was not consistent for the credit amount being claimed. For example, two of the learners consulted for the study each wanted to claim 240 credits, but while one was required to produce a reflective account of 1,200 words, together with a CV, the other had to prepare a 5,000 word essay, supporting evidence and a presentation. Another learner, only claiming for 120 credits, prepared a 5,000-word experience statement, a formal, 6,000-word academic report and had to give a presentation to an assessment panel. Whilst the study does recognise these claims were from different institutions and that further detailed analysis would be required to determine whether indeed there is an issue of inequality, it does suggest that this is something for consideration⁴². The study also notes that all of the experience used to support the RPL claims was taken from a work perspective (none from a personal or everyday experience perspective).

Again with regard to the HE sector, according to the QAA scoping study mentioned earlier (see introduction) one of the institutional enablers required in the sector is the use of technology to enhance the RPL process. For example, this might be through the use of VLEs, technology-enhanced learning, ePortfolios or other e-learning tools⁴³.

Research conducted by SQA has indicated that the use of RPL in its qualifications is relatively limited but learner portfolios are the most commonly used method.

On the basis of the information gathered for this report, it seems that the most commonly used methods at the different stages of the validation process (in the HE sector and for SQA qualifications) are:

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods			
Interview			X
Observation			X
Portfolio method		X (HE and SQA)	X (HE and SQA)
Presentation			X
Simulation and evidence extracted from work		X	X
Tests and			

⁴⁰ Whittaker, R. and Julie Brown (2012). *Streamlining and Enhancing Recognition of Prior Learning Support and Assessment*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

⁴¹ Based on a sample of nine students, from three universities

⁴² Harris, M; J Brown and L Proudfoot (2012). *Learners' Experiences of the Process of Recognition of Prior Informal Learning*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/learners-experiences-rpl.aspx>

⁴³ Whittaker R., Julie Brown, Karla H. Benske and Margaret Hawthorne (2011). *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
examinations			
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify		Written assignments	

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

As noted in the 2010 update, the SCQF guidance state that, “*appropriately trained, supported and resourced staff should assist learners to provide evidence of their learning*”. Each individual organisation can decide whether the support and recognition process is to be a centralised or devolved function; or a combined approach (central co-ordination with devolved support and recognition). Assessment of an RPL claim must be assessed by ‘appropriate subject experts’. Their recommendation is then considered and, where appropriate, approved by the relevant assessment board.

In Higher Education, institutions vary as to whether they take a centralised or devolved approach to the delivery of RPL. Most Scottish HEIs operate a devolved system; responsibility for RPL is held at a faculty/school/department level and there is no or little central coordination or support⁴⁴. At GCU for example, the Admissions Service records RPL applications centrally but guidance, support, assessment and monitoring associated with the RPL process are undertaken at School and programme level and integrated within normal assessment and QA processes.⁴⁵ The School of Health and Life Sciences at GCU has a School RPL Coordinator and RPL Administrator to support and monitor RPL activity across the School. However at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), there is a central RPL Panel which considers all RPL claims within the University. The idea behind having a central panel is to promote consistency in the application of RPL standards, as well as acceptance across the University. Queen Margaret University also has a central RPL panel, with representatives from all subject areas within the School of Health Sciences. This panel ensures that more complex applications for RPL are assessed with rigour and transparency⁴⁶.

The aforementioned small study of learners’ experiences of RPL within the HE sector found that support for RPL was generally provided by allocated members of academic staff within the institution (except in one case, where the learner indicated that she had not received any support at all)⁴⁷. Some examples of how universities allocate staff to the RPL process are outlined below:

- At UWS RPL claims are supported by a (central) Education Guidance Adviser and also a subject specialist;
- The University of Abertay has an APEL coordinator and assessor in each academic school;

⁴⁴ Whittaker R., Julie Brown, Karla H. Benske and Margaret Hawthorne (2011). *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>

⁴⁵ Whittaker, R. and Julie Brown (2012). *Streamlining and Enhancing Recognition of Prior Learning Support and Assessment*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

⁴⁶ For more details of the Queen Margaret University RPL policy for the School of Health Sciences, see the case study prepared for the QAA, available at:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/QueenMargaret_RPL.pdf and the RPL policy, available at: <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/qm/AZindex.htm#>

⁴⁷ Harris, M; J Brown and L Proudfoot (2012). *Learners’ Experiences of the Process of Recognition of Prior Informal Learning*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/learners-experiences-rpl.aspx>

- At GCU, there are School and Departmental RPL Coordinators and academic staff also act as RPL Advisers and/or Assessors⁴⁸.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

A Review of RPL and the SCQF RPL toolkit carried out by Kerson Associates Ltd found that a few organisations in the public sector have some RPL guidance and training in place for staff (and stakeholders). The review found little evidence of such guidance and training in the private and third sectors.

The SCQF Partnership has been running a series of informal (non-accredited) RPL workshops⁴⁹, of which there are two different types; one aimed at people who would be supporting learners to make a claim for RPL, and one targeted at institutions which would be receiving a claim for RPL. These workshops have proved to be very popular.

As noted in the 2010 update, a RPL toolkit has been developed by the SCQF Partnership, for use by practitioners. The aforementioned Review of RPL and the SCQF RPL toolkit found that knowledge of the SCQF RPL toolkit is mainly limited to people actively involved in RPL, mainly working in the public sector. It tends to be used as a supplementary resource. In the small number of cases where the toolkit had been embedded into RPL practices and procedures, it tends to be used in relation to project or pilot activities. It is mainly used to support formative validation, i.e. to assist learners in describing their existing knowledge and skills and to provide guidance to learners about what next steps they might take in terms of their learning. It is also used sometimes to evaluate prior learning when deciding on suitability for entry to a learning programme or qualification.

SQA does not require staff involved in delivering RPL to take additional training before conducting RPL assessments.

As noted in the 2010 update, the Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland has also developed a '[Flexible Entry Staff Development Pack](#)' for HE personnel (both academic and administrative staff). The QAA has now also produced a document called 'Streamlining Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines'⁵⁰ which is intended to support the university sector in Scotland "*in developing and implementing more streamlined, enhanced approaches to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) support and assessment*".

Individual universities often have policies and/or guidance notes which can be referred to by staff involved in delivering RPL, for instance:

- GCU has a RPL policy⁵¹ which provides details of the university's RPL process and quality assurance mechanisms, including flowcharts and key roles. The University has also developed RPL resources, support and CPD opportunities for staff;
- The Robert Gordon University (RGU) School of Nursing and Midwifery RPL guidelines⁵² provide details of academic regulation and professional requirements, as well as an overview of the Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning process, including a flowchart;

⁴⁸ Whittaker, R. and Julie Brown, 2012, *Streamlining and Enhancing Recognition of Prior Learning Support and Assessment*. Internet: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

⁴⁹ <http://www.scqf.org.uk/RPL/RPL%20Workshops>

⁵⁰ Whittaker, R. and Julie Brown (2012). *Streamlining and Enhancing Recognition of Prior Learning Support and Assessment*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

⁵¹ GCU RPL Policy, available at:

http://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/gaq/gaqfiles/Revised%20GCU_RPL_Policy_190613.pdf

⁵² Robert Gordon University School of Nursing and Midwifery RPL Guidelines, available at:

<http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/files/RPLAugust08.pdf>

- Heriot-Watt University has prepared a set of APL guidance notes⁵³, which are broken down into two parts. The first part proposes a university framework for RPL and the second part provides specific guidelines for staff;
- Dundee University's RPL policy includes statements on the definition, structure, assessment and criteria for RPL.

There are also some examples of more focused support for university staff involved in delivering RPL. For example, staff at UWS are offered CPD opportunities through its Lifelong Learning Academy; UHI offers staff training in RPL several times a year and on request, which is run by the University's RPL Adviser; GCU provides RPL Advisor and Assessor workshops for staff through GCU LEAD (Learning Enhancement and Academic Development)

Nevertheless, CPD for staff is identified as one of the institutional 'enablers' required to streamline and enhance RPL support and assessment processes in the HE sector in Scotland. Staff capacity and capability needs to be built up in relation to both providing support and undertaking assessment related to RPL. This could be through the provision of training but also through support for peer-to-peer interaction, such as through a Virtual Community of Practice⁵⁴.

Finally, as noted in the country reports for Wales and England and Northern Ireland, a recent development in this area is the introduction of two continuing professional development (CPD) qualifications in RPL: an award at QCF level 3 and a certificate at QCF level 4. These qualifications, developed by Agored Cymru, are intended for practitioners across the UK working at any level in the education and training sector (i.e. general, vocational, higher education and adult education). The award comprises one unit only ('Theory of recognising prior learning (RPL) methodology') while the certificate comprises three modules ('Theory of recognising prior learning (RPL) methodology'; 'Formative Methods of recognising prior learning (RPL)' and 'Summative Methods of Recognising Prior Learning (RPL)'). Although the qualifications are not mandatory for staff working in validation, it is hoped that their introduction should lead to a greater degree of consistency in the application of RPL⁵⁵.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

No specific qualifications requirements for RPL practitioners have been identified through the research.

7 References

- Cedefop (2012). *Analysis and overview of NQF developments in European countries. Annual report 2012, UK chapter-Scotland*.
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/NQF_developments_2012-UNITED_KINGDOM_Scotland.pdf.
- Cedefop (2013). *Europass Activity report*.
http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/Statistics/3_Annual_activity/2013/Europass_Statistic_Reports_Year_Visits_Downloads_2013.PDF.

⁵³ Heriot Watt University Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Guidance notes. Internet:
<http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/aplguidancenotes.pdf>

⁵⁴ Whittaker R., Julie Brown, Karla H. Benske and Margaret Hawthorne (2011). *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*.
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>

⁵⁵ Information provided by Rachel Mooney, Agored Wales; Information about the qualifications can be found at the following links: <http://agored.org.uk/default.aspx?id=497&qualid=126841>;
<http://agored.org.uk/default.aspx?id=497&qualid=126842>

- GCU RPL Policy.
http://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/gaq/gaqfiles/Revised%20GCU_RPL_Policy_190613.pdf.
- Harris, M. et al. (2012). *Learners' experiences of the process of recognition of prior informal learning*. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/learners-experiences-rpl.aspx>.
- Heriot Watt University Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). *Guidance notes*.
<http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/aplguidancenotes.pdf>.
- Kerson Associates (2013). *Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the SCQF RPL toolkit, review report* [unpublished].
- Learning Link Scotland (2011). *Building use of the SCQF RPL toolkit, report to education Scotland*.
<http://www.learninglinkscotland.org.uk/media/112817/building%20use%20of%20the%20scqf%20rpl%20toolkit.pdf>.
- Learning Link Scotland (2012). *Testing out the use of the SCQF/RPL toolkit*.
- National report regarding the Bologna process implementation 2009-12 UK Scotland.
<http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/National%20reports/UK%20Scotland.pdf>.
- OECD. *Thematic review on recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Country background report: UK*.
http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_37141759_1_1_1_1,00.html.
- Queen Margaret University. *Case study prepared for the QAA*.
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/QueenMargaret_RPL.pdf.
- Queen Margaret University RPL policy. <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/qm/AZindex.htm#r>
- REAL project website: <http://realrpl.eu/>.
- Recognition of prior learning and how sectors are using it in the UK and Europe* [unpublished].
- Robert Gordon University School of Nursing and Midwifery. *RPL guidelines*.
<http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/files/RPLAugust08.pdf>.
- Scouts of Scotland. <http://www.scouts-scotland.org.uk/education/support-for-volunteers.aspx>.
- SCQF (2009). *Handbook*.
http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/resources/SCQF_handbook_FULL_-_amended_Dec_09.pdf.
- SCQF (2012). *Partnership, putting the learner at the centre: RPL and the learner journey: conference evaluation report*.
<http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/RPL%20Event%20Report%202012.pdf>.
- SCQF (2010). *RPL toolkit*.
<http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/RPL%20Toolkit%20Updated%20v2%20FINAL%20-%20December%202010.pdf>.
- SQA. *RPL policy*. <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67029.html>.
- UK Quality Code for Higher Education. *Part B: assuring and enhancing academic quality, Chapter B6: assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*.
- UWS case study prepared for the QAA*.
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/UniversityWestScotland_RPL.pdf.
- Whittaker, R.; Brown J. (2012). *Streamlining and enhancing recognition of prior learning support and assessment*.
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>.

Whittaker R. et al (2011). *Streamlining RPL processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>.

Youthpass data supplied by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, extracted 10 September 2013.

8 Websites:

<http://agored.org.uk/default.aspx?id=497&qualid=126841>

<http://agored.org.uk/default.aspx?id=497&qualid=126842>

<http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk>

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/streamlining-rpl-guidelines.aspx>

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/DevelopmentAndEnhancement/Pages/national-framework-rpl-higher-education.aspx>

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/RPL/RPL%20Workshops>

<http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

Scottish Qualifications Authority: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/41328.html>